

Historic Childs, Recreation (including the Gaines Grange), Part 2

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By Doug Farley, Cobblestone Museum Director – Vol. 2. No. 29

GAINES – Much of the recreational activities of citizens in the Hamlet of Childs and Town of Gaines focused around an organization known as the Grange, or more formally, The Patrons of Husbandry.

While the organization was founded to provide valuable services to farm families, it grew to become a center of community engagement for numerous social activities such as dances, box socials, and even a choir.

The Gaines Grange #1147 was formed on Nov. 30, 1908. In May 1909, 40 people were initiated into membership. The first meeting site was in a building known as White's Hall, shown above. The building, located on the southwest corner in Gaines, dated to the turn of the century. Albert Anson Appleton ran a store there, but it also served as headquarters for town meetings, post office, Good Templars, and eventually served as the Grange Hall.



White's Hall suffered a disaster fire on May Day in 1910, disrupting the lives, in one way or another, of most people in the community. The hall was rebuilt following the fire and the Grange continued to meet there until 1915.



In the spring of 1915 the Grange purchased Thurber's Hotel next to the Congregational Church and transformed it into a new Grange Hall. The third floor was fixed up for a dance hall with a superb hardwood floor being installed at the time. This was considered one of the best dance floors around at the time and one of the largest Grange Halls in the region.

A local resident, Fay Hollenbeck, reflected on the Grange dance floor in 1984 at the celebration of the Town's 175th anniversary celebration. "In Gaines, this little village has got one of the best dance floors in Orleans County. It's all narrow boards, laid around, across the end and down the other side, and across the other end. So on a Round Dance you are always dancing with the boards never across them. In those days dances would alternate, first a Round Dance and then a Square Dance."



Photo Courtesy Orleans County Historian

Here we see officers of the Gaines Grange #1147 posed in front of the Gaines Congregational Church in the 1930s. The women in the picture, from left to right, include: Elinor Cooper, Sarah Bacon, Octavia Mather (chaplain), Kate Crowley, Alice Hatch

(secretary), Alma Appleton and Wilhelmina Taylor. The men in the photo include, from left: William Grinelle (trustee), Charles Thompson (trustee), Fred Derisley, Winton Hatch (master), Ronald Spinks, Lewis Reed and William Crowley (trustee).

Local farmer, Charles Thompson (shown in photo above) and his wife, Hannah, were very active in the local Grange. Their daughter, Gail (Johnson) remembered, "My mother used to sell donuts at the Grange square dances on Saturday evenings." The Gaines Grange formed the basis of much of the Saturday night social life in the community for decades.

WWII presented many challenges to everyday life in the community and the Grange suffered a decline in membership in the 1940s. One local Granger, Sylvia Ball, recalled the trying times. "The war was on its terrible move and soon the boys were leaving in the service. Most of the women in Gaines began working at one type of work or another in the war effort. Help became scarce and even busy farmers worked a four hour swing-shift at some essential plant. With sickness in my home, the war on, I too began working which gave me no time for picking up where I left off in the Grange. When it was so I could return to Grange it was well under way, there was an active membership, the war was coming to a close all about and people could relax."

The Gaines Grange #1147 received three plaques from the Sears Roebuck Foundation, along with two \$25 War Bonds, for outstanding community service. The awards recognized the Grange's community service at the time when the Congregational Church burned in 1959. The Grange allowed the church to use their hall for services during the rebuilding. The usage included scout meetings, auctions, dinners and home bureau. The Grange also assisted with construction of the church and a community playground, baseball field, and water supply pond.



The Grange Hall, seen in 1959, when Dean Sprague had a store there and also the Town Clerk's office.

In the 1950s, membership in the Grange reached 105 people. Changing times in the 1960s and 1970s saw membership drop to just a handful of members. The building was then sold in 1979 and the last official act of the Gaines Grange #1147 was its own dissolution in 1979.



The Gaines Grange Hall is currently occupied by Americana Unlimited Antiques, Robin Stelmach, proprietor.